



March 17, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair

House Education Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5423 – An Act Relating to Education -
Health & Safety of Pupils**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for Bill Number 5423, which advances equitable access to high-quality education and ensures emergency safety in schools. Through the ACHIEVE UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to ensuring that every child—regardless of background—has the resources, opportunities, and safe learning environments they need to succeed from early childhood through post-secondary education. Providing schools with the tools to respond to emergencies protects students, educators, and communities, and is an essential component of an equitable and effective education system.

Requiring Rhode Island schools to maintain on-site automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and develop cardiac emergency response plans (CERPs) is a critical measure to safeguard the health and safety of students and athletes. According to the *American Heart Association*, sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is a leading cause of death in young athletes, with survival rates dramatically improving when defibrillation occurs within the first few minutes. The presence of an AED, paired with a well-rehearsed emergency response plan, ensures that students in both academic and athletic settings have immediate access to life-saving care. This legislation aligns with national guidelines that emphasize the importance of rapid response in SCA situations, where survival rates decrease by 10% for every minute defibrillation is delayed (*American Heart Association, 2025*).

Additionally, this bill's focus on high-needs schools is particularly significant, as these institutions often

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face challenges in accessing life-saving equipment and training. By prioritizing funding for schools with high numbers of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals or those participating in the community eligibility provision, the bill addresses disparities in resources. Research from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* shows that schools in low-income areas are more likely to have inadequate health and safety resources, placing students at greater risk (*CDC, 2023*). This legislation promotes equitable access to lifesaving measures and also ensures that regardless of their socio-economic background, they are protected while participating in school activities.

Investing in education is an investment in Rhode Island's future. Bill Number 5423 will help ensure that all students—especially those in historically underserved communities—have the tools they need to thrive in school and beyond. By advancing equitable K-12 education policies, we can break cycles of poverty and health disparities, creating a pathway to long-term success. We respectfully urge your support for this legislation to build a more just and prosperous Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Dana DeMaire

Community Impact & Education Policy Intern

United Way of Rhode Island

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